

The Second Coming, Part 3

Be Ready

Matthew 24:29-44

Big idea: Jesus will return at an hour that we do not expect Him so we must be on the alert and ready.

Intro –

The second to last verse in the Bible is this:

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

That's the natural cry of the believer's heart – come, Lord Jesus. It's the natural cry when we consider the goodness of heaven. It's a natural cry when we are confronted with wickedness on earth and we wonder, "how could You let this happen? How can you let it continue?" Certainly we work for change now but recognize that evil and injustice will continue until He stops them. One day He will come "to judge the living and the dead" as the Apostles' Creed summarized.

Revelation 19:11-13 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and on His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *on Him* which no one knows except Himself. ¹³ *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

He came the first time, gentle and humble. He will come the second time as the Lord of righteousness to war against sin and make right all that appropriately grieves you about the world.

If you've read Eli Wiesel's first person account of the holocaust, or Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, or Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns* as she recounts the migration of 6 million African Americans from the south to settle in the north, east, and west of the country between 1920 and 1970 as they escaped brutal systematic racism you might internally ask, "how long will this continue? When will God put an end?"

Throughout the Old Testament the prophets looked ahead to when God will do just though – put an end to all that was messed up and destructive and unjust and brutal and He would rescue His people. They referred to it as "The Day of the Lord." Sometimes it was referring to a more immediate deliverance but other they clearly looked ahead to the final Day with a capital "D."

Joel 2:11-13 The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it? ¹² "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; ¹³ And rend your heart and not your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil.

God never sends judgment without an opportunity to repent and escape that judgment.

In the fall of 2010 I was driving through Salt Lake City when I noticed a big billboard near the airport. It was a professional looking sign and said "Judgment day is coming – May 21st, 2011). It was put up by Harold Camping with a ministry known as Family Christian Radio. He spend over \$100 million on billboards and advertisements around the country to warn people that Jesus would return and judgment day would occur on May 21st.

When it did not happen he amended his prediction to October 21st, 2011. He later admitted he was wrong.

William Miller, a farmer and lay preacher in Vermont who concluded that Jesus would return between March 21st, 1843 and March 21st, 1844. He never intended to start a movement, but one started around him with prophecy conferences, pamphlets, and books. His followers became known as the Millerites and they numbered in the 10's of thousands. When March 21st 1844 passed without event it was known as the Great Disappointment. The movement lived on and in one group added an emphasis on observing Saturday as the Sabbath, this is the origin of the modern Seventh Day Adventists.

Regarding end times and Jesus' return, many would be helped by these words of Christ:

Matthew 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

"When it comes to the exact timing of Christ's second coming, I'm on the welcoming committee not the planning committee." Adrian Rogers

1. Jesus will **return** after the tribulation. (24:29-31)
 - a. As mentioned last week, there is internal debate among Christians about whether the chapter up until this point has been primarily about the destruction of the temple in AD 70 or a future coming period of distress and destruction that will precede Jesus' return.
 - i. I argued for the second option last week because I think it is the most consistent handling of these verses and the prophecies in Daniel that Jesus makes mention of in verse 15.
 - ii. But it's almost universal that from this point forward, or perhaps verse 36 forward, Jesus is talking about His future return.
 - b. I think the most consistent way is to say this follows right after the tribulation period as it starts v 29 with "immediately after the tribulation of those days."
 - i. Debatable whether to take the description of the sun, moon, and stars as literal or figurative.
 - ii. This phenomenon could match the cataclysmic destruction of these days, but there is also precedent for using language like this in the OT for figuratively describe a great destruction.
 - iii. **Isaiah 34:4-5a** And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as *one* withers from the fig tree. ⁵ For My sword is satiated in heaven, Behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom
 1. In the context it is describing a coming destruction that Edom, one of the neighboring nations, would face that was intense but didn't literally involve the stars and the heavens.
 - c. The sign is the Son of Man, Jesus – describes His appearance at His return
 - d. Two groups – those who mourn and those who are gathered.
 - i. I mentioned last week that I think prior to this great tribulation that Jesus describes, Christians will be removed from the earth in an event we call the rapture. But the book of Revelation describes others who would see these signs and come to Christ during this period.
 - ii. Those that have not responded will mourn. They will realize it's too late and that the message was given to them and they passively ignored it or actively rejected it.
 - iii. Those that have responded will be gathered to Him at His return.
 1. "the four winds" is a figurative way of describing people from all over the world.
2. We can watch for **signs** but we can't know **when** Jesus will return. (24:32-41)
 - a. Parable from the fig tree (vv. 32-33)
 - i. We are starting to get ready for spring although it seems a long way off and January seems like it lasted about 100 days. But sometimes in February tulips begin to pop out of the ground. And in March some trees will develop buds that start to open and we'll know again that summer is coming.

- ii. Jesus used this analogy with a common tree for their area – the fig tree. Unlike many trees in their temperate climate, fig trees did lose their leaves in the winter and gain new leaves in the spring. The coming of the fig leaves don't cause the coming of summer, but they indicate summer is on the way.
 - iii. In the same way the events that Jesus has been describing don't cause His return, but they indicate His return is coming.
 - iv. He is near, at the door – meaning He could walk through the door at any point.
- b. This generation will not pass away until these things take place (v. 34)
 - i. The meaning of “this generation” partly depends on the meaning of “these things.”
 - 1. If “these things” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, then “this generation” refers to the generation alive when Christ taught this in the Olivet discourse.
 - 2. If “these things” refers to a still future destruction, the abomination of desolation, the increasing of birth pains, and the return of Christ and the gathering of the elect, then “this generation” can't be the generation alive when Jesus taught this.
 - 3. I think the best answer is that “this generation” refers to the generation alive when these things start to unfold. They will be like those who see the fig tree branches get leaves and summer follow. The difficulties that increase in frequency and intensity like labor pains, the violation of the temple, the return of Christ will all happen within a single generation.
- c. His Words will stand even if or when heaven and earth pass away (v. 35)
 - i. Arrogant claim if only a man. True claim if He is God and man.
 - ii. In the context it refers to the certainty with which he is describing the future. It will unfold like this. We can hold to it with absolute certainty
- d. But no one knows when this will happen. (v. 36)
 - i. Remember that was one of their questions – when will these things happen? (v. 3)
 - ii. This most naturally connects with the verses that follow.
 - 1. Because we don't know some will just continue living as normal and will be shocked when Jesus returns.
 - iii. How can Jesus not know? He has just described with incredible detail what will happen in the future. How can He not know when it will happen?
 - iv. The author RC Sproul provides a criticism of some wrong ways people try to reconcile this and a right way to approach it.
 - 1. Aquinas via Sproul – Jesus is the 2nd person of the Trinity, God is omniscient, there are no limits to the knowledge of God. So if God and man are perfectly united in the incarnation, Thomas said, Jesus had to know the day and the hour. Why, then, did he say He did not know? Thomas developed what he called the accommodation theory. He said Jesus really did know, but that knowledge was too much for the people to bear; therefore, to accommodate their weakness, he simply told them He did not know. That explanation preserves the omniscience of Jesus at a very high price. It envisions the Son of God speaking a falsehood for expedient reasons.

- a. What's the price of this explanation? Jesus' sinlessness.
 - 2. On the other hand, Sproul points to the historic position of Christianity taught in the Bible but affirmed and spelled out at the council of Chalcedon in AD 451 – truly man and truly God – true humanity united with true deity. Drew a line in the sand defining the boundaries of speculation about the incarnation by affirming that the union of God and man is without mixture, confusion, separation, or division, each nature retaining its own attributes. Didn't result in a blended nature where the humanity of Jesus is mixed with His deity so His humanity isn't really humanity anymore and his deity isn't really deity. The two are present but retain their own attributes. That's why Jesus could get hungry, tired, and sweat – God could not grow weary, but Jesus in His humanity could. But that's also why He demonstrated supernatural knowledge and abilities at times as He acted through His divine nature.
 - v. No one knows when Jesus will return. Not me, not the preacher on tv who can make a convincing argument while he reaches around to your wallet, not a conspiracy theorist on the internet. Don't be misled.
 - e. For (connection to v 36) His coming will be like at the flood. (vv. 37-39)
 - i. Life continued as normal up until the rain fell. Eating, drinking, marrying are normal life things.
 - ii. They could see Noah building for decades but nothing ever happened.
 - iii. In the same way, life will continue as normal right up until this coming of the Son of Man.
 - iv. My life is going fine! Why should I care about what happens after I die or if Jesus returns? It's like people saying, "why should I buy life insurance? I've never needed it before!"
 - f. But His return will interrupt business as usual.
 - i. One taken, one left – probably taken to judgment given the reference to the flood taking people away in v 39.
3. We should be on the **alert** and **ready** as we wait for Jesus. (24:42-44)
- a. Begins a series of 4 parables about the importance of being alert and stewarding the time and resources you have been given before the Lord's return.
 - i. Brief parable of the thief
 - ii. Parable of the faithful and unfaithful slaves in 24:45-51
 - iii. Parable of the 10 Bridesmaids in 25:1-13
 - iv. Parable of the talents 25:14-30
 - b. Just like a homeowner prepares for a thief every night because he doesn't know when he might come, so we are to be prepared every day for Jesus' return.
 - i. You don't need to lock your doors all the time. You could go weeks, months, or years without locking them. You only need to lock them the exact hour that a thief plans to break in. But you don't know when that time is so a wise homeowner locks the doors every night. Most of the time its unnecessary but sometimes it is critical.
 - c. We are to be on the alert – not trying to look busy, not trying to keep ourselves sinless so that Jesus will accept us when He comes. That's not the gospel.
 - d. For this reason we must be ready; for Jesus is coming at an hour when we don't expect Him. (v. 44)
 - i. Being ready means living in light of eternity.

- ii. First and most important is to make sure our eternity will be with Him.
- iii. But it's more than that. It's to live for the line, not the dot.
 - 1. Leon Morris – Jesus doesn't know when His return will happen but He does know that many people will go on living as though this life is all that there is and their personal success is all that matters. Such attitudes are not for the followers of Jesus. They are to have much more of a sense of purpose.
 - 2. Doesn't necessarily mean pick up your life and move overseas as a missionary.
 - a. But it means that you parent in light of eternity.
 - b. You work in light of eternity
 - c. You handle your finances in light of eternity
 - d. You invest your time in a local church in light of eternity
- e. *Only One Life* by CT Studd

Two little lines I heard one day,
 Traveling along life's busy way;
 Bringing conviction to my heart,
 And from my mind would not depart;
 Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
 Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
 Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
 Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
 And stand before His Judgment seat;
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Only one life, yes only one,
 Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
 And when at last I'll hear the call,
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- f. Do you really believe the words of Jesus? Not just mental assent but believing so that it impacts your life?



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